



CITY OF NEW HAVEN
COMMUNITY SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
54 Meadow Street, 9TH Floor • New Haven, Connecticut 06519



Board of Health Commissioners
Meeting Minutes
March 10, 2021

Present: Dr. James Hadler, Chair; Dr. Frank Mongillo, Dr. Darnell Young, Heather Reynolds, Dr. Alice Forrester and Gregg Gonsalves

Staff: Maritza Bond, Director of Health

Call to Order:

Commission Chair Hadler called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m.

Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Hadler moved to approve the February 10, 2021 minutes; Commissioner Gonsalves seconded; minutes were approved with one abstention (Commissioner Reynolds).

Public Comments or Statements:

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

Updates:

COVID-19 Situational Awareness & Response Efforts

Director Bond noted Commissioner Forrester's efforts for promoting COVID-19 vaccines in Fair Haven with "Every Shot in the Arm" for New Haven residents. Commissioner Forrester remarked it's a joint effort put together by Kica Matos, Sarah Miller and others. A press conference is scheduled for Saturday. Volunteers are scheduled to go door-to-door to promote the program. Commissioner Forrester would like to see this effort continued throughout the city.

Director Bond shared an epidemiology update with the Board. Currently, cumulative COVID-19 cases are over 11,573, averaging about 27.5 cases per one hundred thousand, which is approximately 604 cases during the 14-day period; seeing a downward trend.

Health Department Epidemiologists developed an advanced dashboard which shows the total number of vaccinations given by the Department alone (not including vaccination partners). Over 10,000 vaccines have been administered (first and second doses) to individuals who live within the county. There were about 2,300

New Haven residents; however, since New Haven residents were receiving vaccinations in other towns, it was not limited. Recently, the Health Department transitioned to vaccinating New Haven residents only. Also, the Department is transitioning out of the VAMS system. The Department signed an agreement with Yale to fully transition to the Epic system, which will provide the ability to customize and have better control of the clinics.

Two Contract Tracers and a Compliance Tracker were hired with special funds. Currently, they are being trained to respond to positive cases and potential clusters. There was discussion about the racial disparities in the vaccinated population. The Governor's rollout hasn't been able to reach the demographic that the Department needs to address. The Health Department has gone into the neighborhoods, elderly housing complexes, black and brown faith-based organizations to promote vaccinations. Those that are eligible for the vaccine have been coming out. There's a mistrust of the health care system in the black and brown communities, so it's more than just getting "a shot in the arm"; there needs to be an education component. Director Bond has appeared on Spanish radio to help promote the vaccine.

Pop up clinics are especially helpful for seniors who can't get online to make appointments; the City's Elderly Services Department has assisted many seniors with scheduling vaccine appointments. A special phone number was set up averaging 300 to 500 calls a day. Director Bond noted that every Friday, there's a meeting with vaccine partners to make sure that individuals are eligible with whatever form of ID they can provide with name and date of birth. Individuals must sign a form to attest to the information provided.

New Haven area is still in the "red;" not out of the woods. Surrounding towns impact each other. Primary and secondary indicators for New Haven County for school reopening are still in the high category. Other counties have transitioned to moderate, so it's hoped that this trend continues. There's been a decrease in inpatient and ICU hospitalizations. Numbers have gone down in comparison to last report. Closely monitoring the variants – higher number of variants reported in respective counties, with two cases in Connecticut. Don't know how many B117 cases there are. Commissioner Hadler noted that per the State Health Department, about 20% are the B117 variant. It's a rapid spreader with a longer recovery period.

Director Bond noted that the packet she distributed to Board members includes reports from other Department initiatives that can be reviewed at their leisure. Nothing major to report other than one confirmed case of Ebola. New Haven resident traveled from Africa; Department is working with State regarding contact tracing. Individual was not symptomatic. Commissioner Hadler commented that the outbreaks have been in rural areas, not big cities. The U.S. has decided to monitor any travelers from specific countries for 21 days.

Commissioner Young raised a question about multi system inflammatory condition in children (MIS-C). Bond said one case has been reported. There are a few cases in the State with only one in New Haven; no major concern.

Influenza season – only one case of the flu reported in New Haven. Because of all the precautions taken for COVID-19, flu cases are down.

Director Bond shared dashboard on Opioids; high density cases in the Fair Haven neighborhood. Closely monitoring and working with Community Services Division as they have a project going on as well; collaborate on a number of efforts to ensure education in these communities. Fair Haven, the Hill and Dixwell neighborhoods are experiencing the most activity. Commissioner Gonsalves reported that a group of about 30 people was convened to help think about new ideas for harm reduction steps in case epidemics. He and Christine Rodriguez are recruiting individuals from the group to help write a document for presentation at the May Board of Health meeting. There was a brief discussion on a recent opioid overdose incident at a New

Haven restaurant involving two of their employees and one ex-employee. Only one person survived. Location had been cited by Health Department for having after-parties and were on their final warning before being shut down. The restaurant responded positively, so they went through protocols and have a corrective action plan. The location is being closely monitored.

Commissioner Hadler asked about how the vaccination of school personnel (teachers, staff). There are specific clinics for teachers and staff. Clinic at Wilbur Cross High School vaccinated over 1,000 individuals with about 500 teachers and staff. Director Bond will email the vaccination plan to the Board.

Director Bond reported that Dr. Jennifer Vazquez is leaving the Health Department. Her last day is Friday, March 12th. Stacey Hutcherson has been appointed Clinic Director temporary pending testing and started this past Monday. He is very experienced in clinic management having responded to the pandemic in New York City.

Commissioner Gonsalves asked about how the new Federal funding for COVID-19 will be distributed. Director Bond understood that a specific percentage will be distributed at the local level but doesn't have the specifics from the State yet. There's specific money for first responders and public health.

Commissioner Forrester would like to see mental health component strengthened. Suicidality of children is high and has gone up almost 20%. Very concerned about what will happen in the future.

Health Administration Update:

Director Bond reported that the strategic planning consultant, a graduate from Yale University with an MBA background, has just started. There will be some type of Board retreat and members will be part of the process in establishing priorities for the Health Department for the next five years. Will interview with external stakeholders, internally within the Department, and most importantly, the Board of Health to determine where to invest resources and focus. Also, will finalize branding and communications consultant to help rebrand the Health Department, redo the logo. Third consultant will be a support grant writer to assist with packaging. Since the percentage of general funds for the Department is small, it survives on grant funds. A fourth consultant is the Medical Director. Commissioner Gonsalves talked about a project his students are working on to make sustainable public health funding for local health departments post-COVID-19 and not have to rely on grants.

Director Bond reported that the Department is in the final stages of the Lead Litigation Settlement. The Director's goal is to have a press conference at the end of the month detailing how the division has been revamped with measurable outcomes and relaunch the program in a more positive way. Part of the agreement is for Legal Aid to monitor the Department for a time – they'll select random cases to review. A discussion ensued.

Director Bond reported that the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator position is being tested for this week and the process will conclude by Thursday. Also, the Vital Statistics Director positions tested yesterday, and the oral interview is scheduled for Friday. Since Commissioner Young is not available for the interview, she asked if there were any other Board members who could volunteer to take part. Will be developing a test for Program Director of Environmental Health and the Deputy Director. Progress is being made. Still actively looking for nurses; there are several vacant positions. Since the salary is not competitive, the Board of Education has offered special funds for stipends as an incentive.

Commissioner Hadler moved to adjourn; Commissioner Reynolds seconded; meeting adjourned unanimously at 6:30 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 5:30 p.m., via Zoom.

Attest:

Brenda Pantelis

Brenda Pantelis
Executive Administrative Assistant

3-16-21

Date

Approved:

James Hadler

James Hadler, Chair
Board of Health Commissioners

4-14-21

Date